How to improve your business image:

Put quite simply, image is the picture than other people have of you. It is also the picture you hold of yourself. If your business projects a true and accurate reflection of itself, you have a strong competitive advantage in the marketplace.

A neglected poorly communicated or out-dated image can leave an indelible and damaging impression. Once an identify is created is created, it must then be continuously managed. Marketing, advertising and public relations are the tools for image creation and maintenance.

Perception is everything! It can shape your reputation and form a major part in your market positioning, which is ultimately decided by your customers.

Become a good neighbour

Do your activities upset the local community in which you operate? If so, do something immediately about noise, fumes, smells, waste disposal, parking, visual pollution all the things that can create antagonism locally.

Or do your activities receive warm local acknowledgment because you support local development, contribute to local community associations, donate to charities, support schools, sponsor student or apprenticeship awards, and offer assistance with local sport, art and youth activities ?

Think of the many ways that you could keep your local community onside by becoming a good neighbour!

Know your community

No effective program can be planned without knowledge of the local community. What problems are of concern locally, lack of recreation facilities, youth unemployment, historic sites, and pollution? What are your community's main interests, sport, culture, parks and gardens? Who are the opinion leaders? What is the current economic situation?

Only with such background information can your image-building efforts be directed into the correct channels.

Identify and assess available avenues

If you now know what it takes to be a good neighbour, and you know your community, then your business can now explore ways of demonstrating good citizenship and developing the perception of a good neighbour.

List all possible options from which a balanced selection of program strategies can be made, for example;

- **Media relations.** Keeping local media aware of your projects that impact favourably on the local community.
- **Participation.** In local community activities.
- **Newsletters.** For distribution to staff, clients, opinion leaders, libraries and local businesses.
- **Speech-making.** Addressing local schools, clubs, civic groups on the current activities and projects in your business.
- **Sponsorships.** From financing the local pet show to purchasing much needed equipment or supplies for the local retirement village.
- **Product donations**. Donating products or services as prizes in local raffles, at school fetes or for other community fund-raising events.

- **Open days.** Inviting the community to view your facilities, and feature demonstrations, tours and events.

Select your strategies in terms of the nature of your message and business coverage required, cost, time, and your particular business situation.

Building a good reputation

- There is no quick way to have a good reputation.
- A good reputation is everyone's job, not just you, the business owner.
- You cannot have a good external reputation unless you have a good internal reputation.
- Important decisions by stakeholders are based invariably on trust.

Remember it may take years to build a reputation but only a moment to destroy one!

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